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ABSTRACT

Theatre history programs in the medium sized or large university need to be reorganized at the undergraduate level for relevancy in the twentieth century. One possible curriculum would require that 80 percent of the courses taken be in dramatic literature, theatre history, theory, and criticism, while the remaining 20 percent consist of courses involving practical theatre aspects. Since this B.A. program might be considered undesirable by campus theatre directors and acting coaches as well as by employers of high school drama teachers, two other program options are possible. The first would involve double the traditional requirement of theatre history courses plus courses in practical theatre, theatre historiography, and theatre history practicum. The second option would retain basic courses in theatre history and practical theatre aspects, with the bulk of the program consisting of theatre historiography and theatre history practicum. These last two programs would train students for teaching and involvement in educational filmmaking, public relations, or other endeavors consistent with the jet age. (JM)

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THE UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM IN THEATRE HISTORY

by
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Jacob Burckhardt provides the proper framework in which one might tackle the problem of the undergraduate theatre curriculum, for at the base of what is almost exlusively a pedagogical paper there lies the justification for the study of history and of course the history of the theatre. Burckhardt says: "One has to believe that in every ruin there lies the precious jewel of understanding, be it of general or individual consequence, be it a single line from an otherwise worthless author, for it will shed light for us and be of importance for our development. " It seems to me that one of the basic problems with the theatre history curriculum has been the professor of theatre history. Perhaps it is we who have allowed ourselves to be relegated to an ancillary function in a theatre curriculum. In my search among historians such as Mosse, Collingwood, Burckhardt, J.B. Black, Croce, and others I have come across titles such as Poetry of History(Neff) The Art of History(Black), Essays on History and Literature, (Bremmer ed.) and one factor has become clear to me. Theatre History can become engaged in the same renaissance which has been going on with the historians. For example, in the book Essays on History and Literature, the editor Robert Bremmer has said regarding the relationship between literature and history: "The literature of a given period/of the contemporary is part of testimony about the problems and meaning of the era. It may prove indispensable, useful, or of only marginal value to historians of the period. The importance of the testimony resides in the quality of the witness and the susceptibility or sensitivity of the historian evaluator. The question is not whether historians ought to consult literary evidence but how they should employ it to discover and illumine the shape of the past."

In an article in this same work the historian Russel Nye has shed even more specific light upon the artist and the more scientifically oriented historian:

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> The historian and the literary artist use language to express what they explain and conjecture, and they use it symbolically to express more than the words alone mean. The historian like the poet and the novelist, is aware of the metaphoric resources of language, and he draws upon them for both meaning and strength, as the scientist and the social scientist may not. If I were to choose the simplest reason why history belongs with the arts rather than with the sciences, it would be its consciousness of the wider dimensions of language."

I do not want to branch off into directions of philosophy and the meaning of history, for I propose three general curricula in theatre history at the undergraduate level. However, it seems that we must overcome our parochial view that theatre history is closeted away somewhere and relevant only to the initiated. It is no wonder that we are ancillary. I think that we must take our place in the intellectual community as scholars who see theatre history as primary and not secondary subject matter. I quote Nye once again: "The first deep look into the dark pit of racial tensions in the nineteenth century comes in Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson; the underlying implication of Huck Finn is as important a historical fact as Plessy v. Ferguson... There is in Intruder in the Dust a magnificent passage in which Faulkner probes into the mind of a young and sensitive Southern boy who muses on the stream of the past that lies behind him. The literary artist can handle this problem of pastness in ways which the historian cannot." Nye's list grows longer; Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, and others tell the feel of history better than complications of statistics which are regarded as more "scientific." The connection from literature to theatre to theatre history is clear. Let us bring theatre history into the main stream. My specific task is the undergraduate curriculum.

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II

When faced with the prospect of contructing a model program in theatre history, the first reaction, after years of being an "ancillary" person, is one of exhiliration. To begin with the undergraduate student and bring him along with a more than cursory exposure to theatre history is exciting and the rich vistas of research and publication stretch endlessly before us. One can see the student attaining a level of proficiency akin to the political or social historian, the musicologist and the art historian.

However, the challenge is considerably more difficult than the mere listing of courses -- breaking three in six or nine -- and the notification of the student through the class schedule and catalogue. I am speaking from a distinctly practical point of view, at this juncture, for even though the student would benefit from an elaborate and increased exposure, there remain two extremely important questions to be answered: 1) how will one's colleagues react to such a program and curriculum. 2) how does such a program fit into the Theatre curriculum? Let me clarify my perspective. I am not in favor of the transformation of all cirricula into theatre history programs, just as I have been opposed to the exclusion of theatre history classes from the acting-directing-design configuration in the educational theatre program. I am in favor of special tracks -- such as the theatre history course I am proposing -- but all tracks must lead to a central philosophical base. If theatre studies are legitimate in university programs, then theatre history curricula belong there in more extensive and profound form.

III

What of a theatre history program? You must understand I am operating fro[illegible]he premise of a medium-sized or large university with some amount

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of resources to support a program, potentially or really. To begin with the more obvious elements of constructing such a program, it seems appropriate to reverse the general arrangement of courses where production and non-production cores are concerned. That is to say, in most undergraduate programs there is the general survey of courses which is to expose the undergraduate to all facets of the theatre: some work in acting, directing, design, technical theatre, history, dramatic literature, criticism and theory. How students are acquainted with these aspects of the discipline varies from school to school. For example, theatre majors at Wisconsin may take courses in dramatic literature theory and criticism within the theatre department. At a school like Minnesota the students must enroll for classes in literature or foreign language departments. Some undergraduate programs offer no work in the study of the physical theatre, except for extremely fleeting treatment in an introductory course. Other universities offer considerably more. In short, however, there is a general configuration of courses that amounts to this formula: 75-80% of the work is taken in the practical aspects of theatre with the remaining 25-30% distributed among courses in dramatic literature, theatre history, theory and criticism. I would propose that the undergraduate interested in concentrating on theatre history might operate from a reverse pattern: that there be a minimal exposure to production with the bulk of the work consisting of courses in theatre history. The production component is designed for one very important philosophical reason: the student of theatre history must have some modicum of working knowledge where theatrical art is concerned. It would be much less than what is presently the case in most theatre departments and it would have to be made crystal clear that no one emerging from such a program would be

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qualified to perform, let alone teach such subjects as acting, directing, etc. It would equip the student with information essential to evaluating pictorial evidence (entrances, exits, the utilization of complicated machinery etc.)

Such a conversion might look like this:

3 credits	Theatre History:	Greek - Medieval
3 credits	Theatre History:	Continental Renaissance
3 credits	Theatre History:	English Renaissance
3 credits	Theatre History:	England 1660-1800
3 credits	Theatre History:	Continental Theatre 1700-1850
3 credits	Theatre History:	1850 - Present
3 credits	Theatre History:	English and American Theatre 1800 - present

9 credits from the following areas: acting, directing, scene design, lighting, costume design, technical theatre

or

two four-hour courses: acting-directing
design and technology

The responses to such a curriculum would be, to say the least, not entirely positive though the actual reverse has been true for years with no real connection from the university program to the professional theatre. Regardless of what the little old acting coaches in tennis shoes have maintained, the American university theatre has not been the main supplier of practitioners. There are some drawbacks to this program which are obvious to all here, but it might not be unwise to begin with such a model. The major charge which would be levied would be that of practicality. Would a B.A. from such a program be able to find employment? The answer prima facie is no, for the high school is not prepared for such a specialist -- although the idea of theatre history courses for the advanced high school student is now being discussed in some circles -- and the university would demand more training, advanced degrees. At second glance, however, a student

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trained with this kind of academic work could, given the present situation in the graduate theatre program of the American university, compete favorably at a number of select graduate institutions in the country. His background would enable him to delve more deeply into specific areas. In short we would have eventually a well-trained Ph.D.

The factor to bear in mind is one of limitation or selectivity. Such a program could exist only in a handful of large departments, with enrollments large enough to sustain it. Moreover, the connection between undergraduate and graduate training in theatre history would for at least the home institution -- hopefully more -- have to be very firm. Otherwise, there would be no takers. It is assumed also in the courses listed above, that some attention to representative plays would be devoted, so that the student would be familiar with the history of stages and staging of important pieces of dramatic literature from the Greeks to the present day. It should also be added that where faculty competencies and background dictate, certain modules might be substituted: Asian or African theatre, for example. These would depend on availability of trained faculty members.

I must say, that although I would applaud such a program if well taught and administered, I have the feeling that all I have done is reshuffle a nineteenth century view of academic curricula. Perhaps the above mentioned program could be Option A. Its main drawback is rather ruthlessly pragmatic! Who would institute such a program. Will all the directors and acting coaches of the country simply block such a program on their campuses, branding it grossly impractical in light of the current employment situation. They might, but such a question need not be debated here. There are other options, however. Two come to mind. Though both are different, in terms of focus, each shares a common philosophical base, that is con-

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temporary instruction must be conducted with the use of contemporary technology and must, in fact, be a technological interpretation. No matter how much or how violently one might disagree with Toffler's Future Shock or Reich's The Greening of America, the basic thrust of those two books -- don't forget William Erwin Thompson's At the Edge of History -- is that modern technology has forced man into viewing his world from a rapidly changing perspective. To be rather blunt, there is no reason why we should not be teaching theatre history in a manner commensurate with the other teaching which goes on, in the cinema and on the television set, for example. Sesame Street has been utilized to teach pre-schoolers to read. Why not courses utilizing technical devices to teach theatre history, but also training the young theatre historian in some measure of technical expertise. We would have to employ our colleagues in film and television departments, but the benefits would be great. Therefore, I propose two additional curricula which are clearly not traditional, but which more appropriately meet the needs of the late twentieth century. The basic premise is that not only will the student be exposed to the history of the theatre, but he will learn how to record it in ways other than the printed page.

The first option involves roughly a doubling of the traditional requirement of theatre history courses (two semesters covering the theatre from the Greeks to the present day). That is to say, there would be a four-course sequence (twelve semester hours) covering what is usually covered in two. Then, in addition to some exposure to the practical aspects of theatre (acting, etc.) there would be a three hour course in theatre historiography and eight hours in what I call a theatre history practicum. The program would look like this:

3 credits	Theatre History:	Greek - Medieval
3 credits	Theatre History:	Renaissance
3 credits	Theatre History:	17-18th Century
3 credits	Theatre History:	19-20th Century

3 credits	Acting-Directing
3 credits	Design-Technology
3 credits	Theatre Historiography
8 credits	History Practicum

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The two items which obviously need explaining are of course, theatre historiography and the theatre history practicum, but let me present the next third option before I explain.

This option is even more free-wheeling, in that greater time is given over to the production of documents of theatre history. This option would retain the six credit general requirement in acting-directing and design-technology. Moreover, it would reduce the formal exposure to theatre history through two semesters. The bulk of the course would be taken up with a course in theatre historiography and fifteen semester hours of theatre history practicum covering such topics as establishment theatre, theatre of rebellion, or more traditional topics such as classical theatre production, romanticism, expressionsim, the American theatre, etc. The program would look like this:

3 credits	Theatre History:	Greeks-Renaissance
3 credits	Theatre History:	18th Century-Present Day
3 credits	Acting-Directing	
3 credits	Design-Technology	
3 credits	Theatre History Practicum:	Classical & Renaissance theatre
3 credits	Theatre History Practicum:	Romantic & Expressionistic theatre
3 credits	Theatre History Practicum:	Establishment theatre
3 credits	Theatre History Practicum:	American Theatre
3 credits	Theatre Historiography	

What do I mean by theatre historiography and theatre history practicum. One of my advanced undergraduate classes in theatre history examined this semester various essays and works on historiography. The range from Ranke who said the writing of history was nothing more than describing what happened, to Croce and Tillinghast who negated a finite reality which man sought to record, to Emerson who said that history is experience interpreted by reason, and to Russel Nye who said that literature is better history than traditional empirical explication. We learned from the German historian Bertram that there are such perceptions of the writing of history as the history of forms, the history of

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ideas, the history of spirit (Geist) which we might call transcendent values. There must be at the undergraduate level some sort of survey of the general methodologies which have informed man in his writing of history. The transfer to the writing of theatre history is obvious.

The theatre history practicum involves a vastly different perception of scholarship than we have thought. In the practicum courses the student will do the traditional kinds of research - reading secondary and primary materials and collecting pictorial evidence. However, he will do more. He will begin to translate some of his findings into twentieth century forms of communication. A simple movie on the Drottningholm Court Theatre, while admittedly a Swedish Embassy Public Relations film, teaches more about the chariot and pole system of scene changing than chapters of reading. Moreover, that film gives the student some idea of that most illusive component of the history of theatre: the aesthetic achieved while staging. To be sure the student would not only be making films and TV documentaries, he would be engaging more traditional forms of research, such as preparing a paper. The difference between the practicum and the regular course is that the students would approach a given subject as a team of researchers piecing together such difficult phenomenas as acting styles of the Restoration for example. It is at this point that the students of acting and directing might be called into play, presenting scenes from the Restoration to demonstrate style as nearly as possible. It is easy to see how such a practicum would work with other departments.

IV

I am not ready to initiate any of these programs, after all we are reading position papers, not reporting on safe and workable formulae. However, it is clear that we need to not only beef up theatre history programs but reconstitute them in light of the century in which we are living. The basic professor-student relationship which we use dates back to somewhere in the twelfth

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century, at a time when knowledge was far more limited and it was not only feasible but correct for a professor to stand before his students and tell them what he knew. Today, we are told not only that there is no such thing as finite knowledge, but that even the perception and cognition of knowledge is changing. Unless I teach only what I know, rather than what I know which indicates what I would like to find out, I might as well resign myself and the field to the archives. In the October meeting of a Sub-Committee of the History Panel Professor Bertram Gross of Hunter College exhorted us to play the game which is running the country: economics. There is an implication in this statement, we must educate in ways that are not only economically sound but in ways which are a pace with the jet-age and television perception of reality.

I should like my closing statement to be more practical than visionary. What of the questions which I posed earlier? What does the student who is trained under option B or C do? It seems to me that he is headed for one of at least two directions, an advantage over the first option. It is clear that with more extensive study - traditional as well as innovative -- he would make a well trained university professor, knowledgeable in his field and better trained than you or I to teach the history of the theatre. In addition, however, such an individual might be a competing candidate in other fields within the university structure as well as in such endeavors as educational film making, public relations work of a specialized type. We have never tapped packaging and selling to high schools and universities an extensive library on the history of man's theater. My program doesn't even scratch the surface of Europe alone, not to mention, South America, Africa and other emerging nations. If the National Theatre Center is to be established, why not well-trained researchers who can do what the anthropoligist and National Geographic have been doing for years.

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One final statement: such a program is intended for implementation in some, not all, universities in the country. The notion of teaching a theatre history class by repeating the information we have, standing before our students and behind our lecterns with occasional slides thrown in is intolerable to me, when we can have dinner in Chicago and breakfast in Paris, fly to the moon, and be appraised of any national catastrophe within fifteen minutes by turning on our television sets. Let us do what Kenneth Clarke, Alastair Cook and others have done for art and history.

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